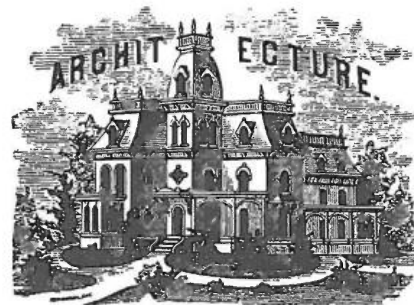


A Biographical Dictionary of Architects in Maine



Ellis F. Lawrence
1879-1946

Ellis Fuller Lawrence ranks among America's most influential architects. He designed over 450 buildings in the Pacific Northwest and was founder and Dean of the School of Architecture and Allied Arts at the University of Oregon from 1914 until his death in 1946.¹ Lawrence's school played a major role in developing an acceptable alternative to the Beaux-Arts system of architectural education.² Unlike the Beaux-Arts system which achieved its results through select Fine Arts methods and strict competition, the Oregon model developed a cooperative interdisciplinary program which encouraged interaction among artists of all types: "architects, landscapers, interior designers, painters, sculptors, etchers, ceramicists, weavers, jewelry makers."³ Oregon consequently produced highly creative graduates who became well-known for finely crafted and ornamented buildings. In the 1930s contemporaries such as Frank Lloyd Wright and the New York architect C. Grant LaFarge considered Lawrence's school to be the best in the country, and Oregon has been a leader in design education ever since.⁴ Although Lawrence's energies were for years

focussed in the West, his inspiration derived primarily from the East. Major parts of Lawrence's design theory can be traced to New England, where the architect was first trained in Massachusetts and Maine.

Following a childhood spent in Malden, Massachusetts and four years at Phillips Andover Academy, Lawrence entered the architecture program of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology in 1897.⁵ At M.I.T., Lawrence received five years training in the principles and practice of architecture, primarily under the eminent French professor Constant Desire Despradelle.⁶ Lawrence remarked about his mentor that, "This man taught me many things, truths about the elements of designs and the spirit of architecture, and I owe him much for these...He taught me to drink deeply of the joy of the work, and how the spirit of play can enter in."⁷

The strength of Lawrence's MIT education was later made evident in the clarity of the Beaux-Arts campus plans he produced for Whitman College in Washington and the University of Oregon. Despradelle also encouraged his students to explore vertical arrangements of building components; this philosophy later resulted in the vertical window groupings in many of Lawrence's buildings. After receiving his B.S. degree in 1901 and his M.S. degree in 1902, Lawrence went to work for Stephen Codman, a Boston architect who was associated with Despradelle.⁸ One account notes that Codman and Despradelle were responsible for sending Lawrence to Portland, Maine, an event which dramatically changed the course of the architect's career.

Five developments unfolded in Portland between 1902 and 1905. Ellis Lawrence began working for John Calvin Stevens, Maine's leading architect, whom Lawrence affectionately called "The Boss." He also met Charles F. Kimball, a landscape painter, who was known locally as "The Master." In Portland, Lawrence designed his first major independent work, a competitive design for the Cumberland County Court House, and it was "A church project in Portland (that) sent him to Europe for special research and study."¹⁰ In Portland, Lawrence also met Alice Louise Millett, whom he courted and wed in 1905.

The first of these events significantly affected Lawrence's methods of architectural design and his theories of architectural education. John Calvin



Figure 1. Project for Cumberland County Court House, Portland, 1904 (MHPC).

Stevens influenced Lawrence's career in at least three distinct ways. He introduced the young M.I.T. graduate to such specific architectural motifs as the Colonial Revival, Shingle, and double-gabled "English" styles which Lawrence later used in the design of many of his own rural domestic buildings in the Northwest.¹¹ Stevens also assisted his former employee in securing positions as planner, founder and Dean of architectural studies at the University of Oregon.¹² Finally, Stevens provided the humanitarian role model which Lawrence copied to establish the social basis of the new architectural system. As Lawrence concluded in 1913:

Rare, indeed was the fellowship between that "Boss" and his men. Never have I seen since in the various offices in which I have worked, the same degree of loyalty and faithfulness, the spirit of co-operation, as I found in that office...I cherish more in my experience in the office of "The Boss" the something he inspired in me which has made me desire above most other things in my professional career the same devotion and loyalty and co-operation from my men as he received from his.¹³

Ellis Lawrence repaid his "Boss" in part by advertising the Maine architect's work in Oregon in the first exhibit of the Portland Architectural Club in 1908.¹⁴ Later, Lawrence wrote the definitive article about Stevens' design methods, which was published in *Architecture* in July, 1932.¹⁵

Lawrence stated that "three rare men who have influenced my point of view materially and to whom I feel greatly indebted...(are)...Despradelle, John Calvin Stevens and Kimball of Portland, Me."¹⁶ Lawrence met the latter individual on an artistic outing in Maine arranged by Stevens' office group.

The M.I.T. graduate later summarized: "(Kimball) taught me the story of a man who cared more for his art than he did for money. He taught me to look upon the architect as a menace who allows the commercial spirit to dominate his work."¹⁷ Working closely with the "Master" painter, Lawrence experimented with his own presentation media and became familiar with the concept that architecture is supported by a number of related arts.

Ellis Lawrence's Cumberland County Court House project was a significant work for diverse reasons (Figure 1). First, it was indicative of Lawrence's high standing in the Maine architectural community that he was invited to compete directly against some of the state's most established architects. His own "Boss" Stevens, Francis H. and Edward F. Fassett, Frederick Tompson, and George Burnham were among the others who submitted proposals in 1904.¹⁸ According to one source, only "Eight architects received invitations to submit proposals and were given only three weeks to complete their work" in this competition.¹⁹ Lawrence's rendering is especially important because the courthouse was his first professional project, the first building he designed on his own after graduating from M.I.T.²⁰ It clearly portrays the quality of his design thinking at this time. One notes the strong influence of both Kimball and Despradelle, especially Kimball in the landscape emphasis of the image in which trees overpower a building which is further dematerialized by an impressionistic treatment. Despradelle's authority is present in the strong verticality of the central mass of this Renaissance Revival design.²¹ The rusticated base and planar facade on the building's major

stories expressed the grandeur and proportions of an Italian palazzo, while the tower profile resembles Renaissance portions of Michelozzo's Portinari Chapel in Milan.²² Although the Cumberland County Court House was not given this dramatic form as built, Lawrence continued to be inspired by similar compositions. The Court House was the earliest of a large class of formal buildings Lawrence designed that were bilaterally symmetric, tripartite in elevation, and arranged with a dominant center and subordinate sides. Lawrence enlivened a standard Beaux-Arts composition with highly expressive and engaging detail. On the West Coast, his Elsinore Theater in Salem, Oregon of 1926 and Tillamook County Court House of 1932 are but two of the direct descendents of his Portland design.²³

Following his Cumberland County Court House proposal, Lawrence assisted Stephen Codman of Boston in designing the Emmanuel Chapel for the Episcopal Cathedral of Saint Luke in Portland (Figure 2). This chapel is a rear addition to a basilica plan church that was built in the Gothic style. It achieves a tremendous sense of spiritual transcendence by incorporating physical forms derived from the Pantheon in Rome and select Gothic cathedrals in France, a remarkable synthesis which was suggested in part by the spatial limitations of the site and the style of the original church. Like the Pantheon, Emmanuel Chapel has a toplighted oculus, a spherically bounded ceiling with a repetitive geometric pattern, and a stone mosaic floor. It is octagonal in plan, and, like a Gothic cathedral, is richly decorated with such medieval Christian motifs as a madonna and child painting by John LaFarge, Gothic ribbed arch vaulting, and panels and angels carved from mahogany. The immediate success of the chapel's design is supported by ample testimony. As one of its first observers remarked: "All through the Chapel there is that idea of reaching upwards, as if drawing heart and mind and soul to Heaven..."²⁴

Just as it drew from several precedents, Emmanuel Chapel was also a collaborative effort. The Episcopal Bishop of Maine, the Right Reverend Robert Codman, D.D., was the client. His brother Stephen Codman was the architect. Ellis Lawrence was the architect's assistant, supported by Stephen Codman to research Gothic cathedrals in France for five months in 1905. Lawrence resided on the Rue de Seine in Paris with Raymond Hood, another of Despradelle's students, who later "directly designed or indirectly catalyzed New York's greatest buildings" according to Norval White.²⁵ Lawrence became mesmerized by "the discovery of my first Cathedral-Amiens"²⁶ and sent back drawings of others at Beauvais, Chartres, and Mont St. Michel.²⁷ Working on Saint Luke's was a remarkable experience for Ellis Lawrence. It allowed him direct input into the design of one of Maine's finest church buildings. It also gave him the beginning of a grand tour of Europe which enriched the quality of his architectural practice ever after.

Lawrence was greatly influenced by his contact with French Gothic architecture. His later West Coast work included much experimentation in Gothic ranging from cathedral-like structures such as Westminster Presbyterian Church in Portland, Oregon of 1911-12 to Gothic "cruck" churches like Augustana Lutheran Church of 1939 to rectangular, non-ecclesiastic buildings that were externally ornamented in Gothic style like the Art Museum at the University of Oregon of 1930. While he was in France, Lawrence also toured the Loire Valley, Fontainebleau, Coutances, old houses in Rouen, and other sites. This exposure also helped him later to design a number of American buildings interpreting the French Second Empire Style.

Lawrence concluded his French studies for St. Luke's Cathedral by November, 1905. He then travelled to Chester, England, where he wed his fiancée, Alice Louise Millett. Clearly, Lawrence continued to observe architectural details at this time. Regional construction characteristics of Cheshire County include the use of black and white and small decorative panels in the timber frame.²⁸ Panels with quatrefoils and cusped, concave-sided lozenges present a decorative image both in historic Cheshire County and in the United States, where Lawrence employed aspects of this style in such commissions as Sigma Alpha Epsilon Fraternity in Eugene, Oregon.

As a married couple, the Lawrences travelled across Europe and visited Italy, where the architect continued his study of classical and Renaissance subjects. The Albina Branch Library of Portland, Oregon, and Gerlinger Hall and the Library at the University of Oregon are but a few buildings that reflect Lawrence's interest in Brunelleschi's work and the regional styles of the Lombard provinces of northern Italy. Finally, having been exposed to Gothic, French, English and Italian precedents, and having proved himself to be a capable associate for both Codman and Despradelle, Ellis's Grand Tour of Europe concluded in the winter of 1905-06. New plans were made between Codman, Despradelle, and Lawrence to put Lawrence in charge of a California office for the Boston firm.²⁹

The Lawrences' destination was San Francisco, and they had arrived as far as Portland, Oregon by March, 1906.³⁰ Lawrence recollected that he "liked this city and was still resting there when the earthquake and fire struck the city by the Golden Gate."³¹ Following the devastating San Francisco Earthquake and Fire of 1906, the Lawrences chose to remain in Portland, Oregon. They first boarded at the Gladstone Hotel, and he worked as a draftsman for the architect Edgar M. Lazarus.³² Later in 1906 Lawrence was accepted as a partner in an architectural and engineering firm with his former M.I.T. classmate Ernest B. MacNaughton.³³ Lawrence was chief architectural designer for MacNaughton, Raymond and Lawrence. One of their earliest projects was the substantial Ellis Lawrence Residence, built



Figure 2. Emmanuel Chapel, Cathedral of St. Luke, Portland, Stephen Codman, architect, 1908 view (Courtesy of Maine Historical Society).

at 453 N.E. 21st Street about 1906. The firm was employed to do a significant amount of residential, commercial, industrial, educational, and institutional work.³⁴

Ellis Lawrence placed himself in charge of the effort to start a Portland Architectural Club, and in the process became familiar with some of the best architects in the Northwest, including the young draftsman Louis Conrad Rosenberg, whom Lawrence hired as an employee in 1908.³⁵ Feeling limitations at MacNaughton, Raymond and Lawrence, Lawrence and Rosenberg left the parent firm in 1909.³⁶ By this time Lawrence had already established himself as one of the most active and talented designers in the region.

Lawrence was stylistically fluent and progressive, working within the context of many architectural traditions. Modelling himself in part after his own mentors Despradelle, Stevens and Kimball, Lawrence became leader to a large group of followers. He was instrumental in forming the Oregon Chapter of the American Institute of Architects, the Oregon Building Congress, the Portland Builder's Exchange, and he served as President of the Association of Inter-Collegiate Schools of Architecture.³⁷ His firm continued in Portland under the names of Ellis F. Lawrence, Lawrence and Holford, Lawrence, Holford, Allyn and Bean, and Lawrence, Tucker and Wallmann.³⁸ His protegee Rosenberg similarly became trained at M.I.T. and in Europe, and then returned to Oregon to assist Lawrence in his most influential project, the formation of the new architecture school at the University of Oregon.³⁹ Through his system of "uninhibited friendliness" and with the input of other theorists such as Walter R.B. Willcox of Seattle, Lawrence established a new architectural system, which soon became adopted by other schools, beginning with Columbia, Harvard, and M.I.T.⁴⁰

William Emerson stated in his 1946 biography that Ellis Fuller Lawrence was "doubly tied" to New England, through his early work experience and his wife, both from Maine.⁴¹ In actuality, it appears that Lawrence's connections to the East were far stronger than this. Role models for his educational philosophy, contacts for his University of Oregon positions, and three strong influences — Kimball, Stevens and Despradelle — all came from New England. Precedents for virtually all his work — Beaux-Arts, Shingle Style, Colonial Revival, English, Gothic, French and Italian — were derived from his New England experience or through his European education, which in turn was initiated because studies were needed for a cathedral chapel in Portland, Maine. Thus Massachusetts and Maine fundamentally influenced many of Lawrence's accomplishments, including the forms and stylistic motifs of a great number of his buildings and the underlying structure of his educational curriculum.

The first of these changed the face of the Pacific Northwest; the second changed national perceptions concerning the essence of architectural education.

John V. Goff
March, 1987

NOTES

- ¹ The Ellis F. Lawrence Research Seminar held at the University of Oregon in the fall of 1986 tabulated the total of Lawrence and Lawrence firm designs to be 456. For a general account of Lawrence's life, see his obituary by William Emerson in the *ALA Journal*, 1946.
- ² Mable Holmes Parsons, "One of Oregon's Great Men: Ellis F. Lawrence," Lawrence Collection, University of Oregon, Eugene.
- ³ Lawrence, "A Letter from the Oregon Country", c. 1939, p. 7, Lawrence Collection, University of Oregon, Eugene.
- ⁴ Ibid., also David A. Sandahl & Ricardo Castro, *An Architectural History of the University of Oregon* (draft), 1975, p. 5.
- ⁵ Emerson, Lawrence obituary, op. cit.
- ⁶ Ibid., also Sandahl & Castro, op. cit., p. 1.
- ⁷ Lawrence speech, *Pacific Builder & Engineer*, July 19, 1913. Lawrence identifies the "Frenchman" as Despradelle in a letter to Charles A. Lawrence, July 29, 1913, Lawrence Collection, University of Oregon, Eugene.
- ⁸ Sandahl & Castro, op. cit., p. 1. It is not known what work Lawrence did while he was employed at Codman & Despradelle. Codman and Despradelle's most important works were the Peter Brent Brigham Memorial Hospital of circa 1912 and the Berkeley Building of 1905 at Boyleston and Berkeley Streets, both in Boston. MIT has Codman & Despradelle drawings thought to be a design for a college campus which was never built.
- ⁹ Parsons, op. cit., p. 2.
- ¹⁰ Emerson, op. cit., describes Lawrence's work with Stevens. *Pacific Builder & Engineer* and Charles A. Lawrence's letter, op. cit., describe Lawrence's friendship with Kimball. The Cumberland County Court House design was published in the *Catalogue of the Portland (Oregon) Architectural Club*, 1908. Parsons, op. cit., describes Lawrence's trip to Europe.
- ¹¹ Lawrence's Charles T. Todd House is an example of his Colonial Revival work, the William Todd House an example of his Single Style work, and the Alpha Phi Fraternity an example which uses the double-peaked gable. All of these motifs were earlier associated with John Calvin Stevens. See Stevens & Cobb, *Examples of American Domestic Architecture*, New York, 1889.
- ¹² Stevens' recommendation for Lawrence to secure work at the University of Oregon in 1910 is on file in the Stevens folder, Lawrence Collection, University of Oregon, Eugene.
- ¹³ *Pacific Builder & Engineer* and Charles A. Lawrence letter, op. cit.
- ¹⁴ *Catalogue of the Portland (Oregon) Architectural Club*, 1908.
- ¹⁵ "John Calvin Stevens", *Architecture*, July 1932, pp. 1-6.
- ¹⁶ *Pacific Builder & Engineer* and Charles A. Lawrence letter, op. cit.
- ¹⁷ Ibid.
- ¹⁸ Roger G. Reed, "George Burnham", *Biographical Dictionary of Architects in Maine*, Vol. 1, No. 1, 1984.
- ¹⁹ Ibid.

- ²⁰ The Cumberland County Court House scheme remains the earliest known non-student project of Lawrence. The University of Oregon Library has preserved several drawings of an earlier date which were executed by Lawrence while a student at MIT. These drawings are pen and ink washes of the various Classical orders.
- ²¹ Despradelle was known for stressing vertical compositions. His most famous design was his proposed Beacon of Progress, which was published in *Pencil Points* in May, 1925. Codman & Despradelle's Berkeley Building of 1905 also was designed to revive the vertical Gothic style. See Donlyn Lyndon, *The City Observed: Boston*, New York, 1982, pp. 147-149. Francis Swales noted, "Despradelle...was among the earliest of designers to recognize the artistic value of the vertical characteristic of the American type of office building construction.", *Pencil Points*, op. cit., p. 59.
- ²² Peter Murray, *The Architecture of the Italian Renaissance*, 1963, p. 99.
- ²³ Photographs of Lawrence's work are on file in the Ellis F. Lawrence Research Seminar materials, University of Oregon.
- ²⁴ "Emmanuel Chapel", *The North East*, Portland, Maine, February, 1908, p. 8.
- ²⁵ Norval White, *The Architecture Book*, 1976, p. 146.
- ²⁶ Lawrence, "A Letter from the Oregon Country", op. cit., p. 1.
- ²⁷ These sketches were published in the Catalogue of the *Portland (Oregon) Architectural Club*, 1908.
- ²⁸ R.W. Brunskill, *Traditional Buildings of Britain*, London, 1985, pp. 130-132; Nicholas Pevsner, *The Buildings of England: Cheshire*, London, 1971, p. 255.
- ²⁹ Sandahl & Castro, op. cit., p. 2.
- ³⁰ David W. Hazen, "It's the Birthday of Ellis Fuller Lawrence", *Oregonian*, November 13, 1931, p. 9.
- ³¹ Ibid.
- ³² Portland, Oregon City Directories, 1905, 1906, 1907.
- ³³ Sandahl & Castro, op. cit., p. 1.
- ³⁴ For the work of MacNaughton, Raymond, and Lawrence, see 1906-1912 projects listed in the Ellis F. Lawrence Research Seminar materials, University of Oregon.
- ³⁵ Joby Patterson, *Architecture on Copper: Louis Conrad Rosenberg*, 1986 typescript, pp. 2-3.
- ³⁶ Reference to Lawrence's perceived limitations of his situation at MacNaughton, Raymond and Lawrence is made in Stevens' letter to Lawrence, October 13, 1910, Stevens File, Lawrence Collection, University of Oregon.
- ³⁷ Emerson, op. cit.; Fred Lockley, "Impressions and Observations", *Oregon Journal*, May 6, 1933, p. 4: "Mr. Lawrence aided in organizing the Portland Builder's Exchange, The Oregon Building Congress, and the Oregon Chapter of the American Institute of Architects."
- ³⁸ Portland, Oregon City Directories.
- ³⁹ Patterson, op. cit., pp. 4-7. Correspondence between Lawrence and Rosenberg is found in the Rosenberg File, Lawrence Collection, University of Oregon.
- ⁴⁰ In 1980, The Department of Architecture at the University of Oregon published W.R.B. Willcox: *His Architectural and Educational Theory*. Retired professor Phillip Gilman is said to have been a prime organizer of this work. This text accounts well for Willcox's input and states (p. 31 in chapter entitled "Freedom and Responsibility — The Educational Philosophy of Walter Willcox" by David Shelman): "During the 1930s a decade following Oregon's move, schools across the country began to abandon the Beaux-Arts methods of architectural education. The major schools — Harvard, Columbia, Massachusetts Institute of Technology — were first, the others followed their lead. Oregon became a model as these schools initiated their programs." Parsons, op. cit., also states: "the Oregon method has paved the way for the free non-competitive modern point of view in professional schools throughout the country."
- ⁴¹ Emerson, op. cit.

LIST OF KNOWN COMMISSIONS IN MAINE BY ELLIS F. LAWRENCE

Project for Cumberland County Court House,
Portland, 1904, Not executed.

Photograph of Ellis F. Lawrence
Courtesy of M.I.T. Museum

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